

Improv ... A Team Sport

Improv-classes-10 tips <http://www.humorthatworks.com/learning/10-life-tips-from-improv-class/>

Though the art/life debate is similar to that of the chicken/egg, I am a firm believer that much can be gained from taking a look at art to reflect on our life (take the “[What I Learned From](#)” series for example). With that in mind, I also believe that many of the tips that make us better artists, also make us better people.

So I present here 10 life tips I learned from improv classes at the [Upright Citizen's Brigade Theater](#).

1. “Dare to be dull.”

When most people start improvising, they think they need to create crazy characters and wacky situations to be funny. But the reality is that comedy comes from truth—it **doesn't need flashing lights or fancy fog machines**. The same is true when it comes to certain work and life situations. **Success isn't** about getting the newest gadget (aka the flashing lights); success comes from hard-work and planning, which might be viewed as dull, but it is effective.

“A well-managed factory is boring.” – Peter F. Drucker

2. “Make a connection with the other player.”

Improv is a team-sport, as are work and life. To have a successful improv scene, you must connect to the other player and focus on your relationship. **It's easy to forget about this when performing on a stage in front** of people, and just as easy to forget when trying to make a sale or talking to our significant other. But life is about relationships and connections, not material objects or status.

“Only a life lived for others is worth living.” • – Albert Einstein

3. “Make it about the present.”

To see two characters reminisce about their history or to talk about future plans is boring to the audience—we want to see them act now. Life is the **same way, except we're the characters**. Too often we are caught up in one happened awhile ago or what we should plan for, and we completely ignore the present, the now. By focusing on the now we start to take control and experience life, instead of missing it.



“Life is what happens while you’re busy making plans.” – John Lennon

4. “You have to understand *why* you’re playing that game.”

As an improviser, one of the most important qualities you have to reveal as your character is your motivation. Why are you doing what you are doing? This question is equally valuable in every day life—what is your motivation for doing whatever it is you are doing? If you ask yourself this about everything, **you’ll realize there’s a number of things that you do out of habit or because it’s a societal norm that you aren’t really motivated or excited to do. Stop them.**

“If a man hasn’t discovered something that he will die for, he isn’t fit to live.” – Martin Luther King Jr.

5. “Never expect a certain answer or reaction. Just listen and react to what was *actually* said.”

Our education system has taught us to listen to react—to start to formulate an **answer for the question our teacher is asking us, before she’s even finished** asking it. The problem is that in meetings and conversations, we stop listening once we think we know what someone is going to say because we start thinking about our response—often missing the true point of what is being said. If you want to be a better communicator, stop assuming you know what is being communicated and start listening to what is actually being said.

“Seek first to understand, then to be understood” – Stephen R. Covey

6. “Make your fellow players look like geniuses.”

When you treat other **people like geniuses, you’ll often find that they are.** Too often we look at what mistakes people have made instead of seeing what **they’ve done correctly.** When you look for the positives and build on successes, your team (or family) can achieve far better success both as individuals and as a team.

“Treat a man as he is and he will remain as he is. Treat a man as he can be and should be and he will become as he can and should be.” – Goethe

7. “It doesn’t matter what you’re doing on stage, as long as you sell it.”



This is known as the “Karaoke Rule”—you don’t have to be the greatest singer to be good at karaoke, you just have to sell it. **If you don’t, people will pick up on your nervousness and you’ll lose them as an audience.** So whether you are standing in front of your managers giving a presentation or about to belt out the words to Bohemian Rhapsody, **you’ll find much better success by giving it your all and selling it.**

“All you need in this life is ignorance and confidence; then success is sure.” – Mark Twain

8. “Be more brave than impressive.”

When I first started performing improv, I thought I always had to try to come up with the wittiest thing to say or add wordplay or puns to get a laugh (hey, I enjoy puns). **While wit can be funny, it’s not what entertains the audience—bold choices are.** **What you’ll soon find out is that being bold is what makes you impressive, regardless of what you are doing.**

“Whatever you do or dream, you can begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.” – William Hutchinson Mary (thanks for the correction, Adam!)

9. “Just make a choice.”


Ambivalence and timidness are the death of an improviser on stage. Since everything is made up, you just have to make a decision and go with it. **Once you make a decision, it’s up to you and your scene partner to go with it and make it work.** **In life, we don’t get things done because we haven’t decided what we want, and until we do, we’ll never be able to achieve it.** **Make a choice, that’s the start.**

“The first step to getting the things you want out of life is this: Decide what you want.” – Ben Stein

10. “When in doubt, have fun.”

Sometimes, before a big show, I make sure I remind myself that improv is fun—that’s why I do it. I step on stage to have fun and entertain others. **So when I’m in a scene and I’m not sure what else to do, I do what is fun; I play games, I make interesting choices, and I enjoy myself.** Because in improv there is no right or wrong, just fun. **By now you should know what I’m going to**





say—life is the same way. Excluding immoral / illegal activities, there is no wrong in life, only what you choose to make it. So when in doubt, choose fun.

“People rarely succeed unless they have fun in what they are doing.” – Dale Carnegie

